

Solid Waste Task Force



Residential Waste Collection Issues in Fairfax County

Customer Service, Environmental,
Operations, and Communication

May 23, 2005

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Executive Summary

Background	5
Members of the Solid Waste Task Force.....	6
Objectives	6
Methodology	7
Recommendations	8
Chart	9

Chapter 2 Customer Service

Overview of Customer Service Issues.....	10
Frequency of Service	11
Missed Collections	11
Competition	13
Weight of Collection Containers	13
Size and Volume of Brush	14
Rate Increase Amounts In Rate Increase Announcements.....	15
Safety Issues (traffic congestion, unsafe driving on streets)	16
Extra Charges for Special Collections	16
Strategy for Emergencies	16
Service Level Agreement.....	18



Chapter 3 Environmental

Overview of Environmental Issues	20
Air Emissions from Trucks and Use of Special Fuels	20
Collection and Recycling of Materials	21
Plastic Versus Paper Bags for Collection of Yard Waste and Leaves	21
Separate Collection of Yard Waste within HOAs That Have Grounds Maintenance Contracts	22
Electronic Waste (e-waste).....	23
Removing Nickel Cadmium (NiCad) Batteries from the Waste Stream.....	24

Chapter 4 Operations

Overview of Operations Issues	26
Tour of Facilities	26
Inspections and Permitting of Vehicles	27
Assurance Bond Policy	28
Unified Recycling Activities	28
Enforcement Issues.....	29
Consequences of the County Getting Out of Direct Waste Collection in Sanitary Districts	30
Process for Procurement of County Contracts	32

Chapter 5 Communication

Overview of the Communication Issues	34
Fairfax County's Role in Communication.....	35



Collectors' Role in Communication	37
Customers' Role in Communication	37

Appendices

- A List of Categorized Issues
- B Minutes of Solid Waste Task Force Meetings
- C Quality Customer Service Standards
- D County Research on Plastic versus Paper Bags for Yard Waste Collection
- E Tour of Disposal and Recycling Facilities in Area
- F Fairfax County Collection Service Areas



Executive Summary

Background

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) promulgated regulations in 2001 that required all jurisdictions to prepare and submit a Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) to the state by July 1, 2004. These plans describe how the jurisdictions' solid waste management system will operate during the next 20 years and encompass all source reduction, reuse, recycling, collection, transportation, and disposal activities within the jurisdiction, both public and private.

In Fairfax County, this comprehensive plan was developed over an 18-month period and contained input from stakeholders, residents, businesses, and county staff. An extensive community outreach program gathered information about relevant topics via an online survey, attendance at hundreds of community meetings and formal public meetings, culminating in a public hearing before the county's Board of Supervisors on May 10, 2004. Most of the recommendations in the plan were approved at the public hearing. The recommendation for an expanded county role in the control and administration of residential solid waste collections spurred significant community concern and the Board of Supervisors decided to remove the recommendation from the plan and create the Solid Waste Task Force (SWTF). With this change made, the plan was submitted to VDEQ in June 2004.

The Board of Supervisors appointed members of the SWTF in May 2004, to work with county staff "to resolve issues related to service quality, competition, air emissions from trucks, safety, disaster and emergency response, unified recycling activities and other issues that may be specified by the Board of Supervisors," along with those issues that had been identified during the public outreach process prior to approval of the SWMP.

Members of the Solid Waste Task Force

<u>Member</u>	<u>Stakeholder Position</u>
William Lecos , Chairman*	Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce
Joanne McCoy, Vice Chairman*	Small Solid Waste Collection Company
Phil Auld**	Large Solid Waste Collection Company
Marilyn S. Blois	Fairfax County Consumer Protection Commission
Joyce Bissonette	Fairfax County Small Business Commission
Joan Carr	Community Representative
Queenie Cox	County Sanitary District Representative
Peter Crane (resigned)	Large Solid Waste Collection Company
Joyce Doughty	Solid Waste Management Program Staff
John Hasle	Small Solid Waste Collection Company
Jim Langemeier	Recycling Market
Paul J. Liberty	Subscription Customer
Conrad Mehan	Medium Solid Waste Collection Company
Sheila Roit	Environmental Quality Advisory Council
Robin Smyers	Contract Customer
John Townes (resigned)	Community Representative
Clark Tyler	Community Representative
* Elected at the first task force meeting	
** Replaced member who resigned	

County staff assisted the SWTF during its deliberations. Jeff Smithberger, Director of Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling, was the principal county staff member, assisted by Linda Boone, Branch Chief, Planning and Resource Recovery, Division of Solid Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery. Additional assistance was provided by Marilyn McHugh, Assistant County Attorney.

Logistics Management Institute (LMI), a not-for-profit consulting firm located in Tysons Corner, worked periodically with the SWTF as a multi-functional resource that had been involved with the development of the SWMP.

JRH Associates, Inc., an Alexandria company, provided facilitation and technology support using GroupSystems software at the county's Group Decision Support Center (GDSC).

Objectives

The objectives of the SWTF identified during the initial task force meeting on June 8, 2004 and reiterated during the September 2004 meeting were:

1. To prepare a report to the Board of Supervisors within 1 year (May 2005).



2. To enhance relationships between collection companies and the county by improving communication.
3. To ensure local communities are kept abreast of and involved in the task force process.
4. To ensure that the small business point of view is represented.
5. To identify mutually beneficial resolution of issues.
6. To educate about expansion of all types of recycling.
7. To ensure that issues are resolved in the best interest of the community.
8. To reach viable consensus on issues with consideration of a broad perspective of ideas.

The SWTF, in conjunction with county staff, identified and categorized the issues and methodically worked through them using facilitated meetings and the group decision support technology to assist in the discussion, consensus building and preparation of this report. The initial list of issues is shown in Appendix A.

Members of the SWTF met periodically with waste collection companies and the Citizens Advisory Committee on Solid Waste to discuss the deliberations and gather feedback about their proposed recommendations. They also toured 7 local composting, disposal, recycling or transfer operations early in the process to familiarize themselves with environmental and operations issues. During the tour members obtained information from the facility operators about the county's integrated waste management system. The proceedings of the SWTF were continually updated and available to the community on a specially designed webpage on the county's website: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/swtf>.

Methodology

The issues surrounding residential waste collection are complex and the perspectives of the task force members diverse. The SWTF organized the issues into 4 categories: **customer service, environmental, operations** and **communication** issues. It consolidated similar issues and then defined, discussed and prioritized them within the categories. These categories form the framework for the remainder of this report.

SWTF members researched information about each topic, gathered information from stakeholders, participated in discussions about the issue, and weighed the impact on the community of various recommendations. Finally, they assessed each issue in terms of the recommendations the task force would like to make to the Board of Supervisors. Full and complete discussion of each issue resulted in members being apprised of the implications of recommendations such as cost,



difficulty to implement within the county or by the collection companies, and impact to residents or customers of changes in residential waste collection services.

The task force used the GroupSystems software in the Fairfax County Group Decision Support Center (GDSC) and the services of a facilitator/technographer. This approach allowed the SWTF to capture all ideas anonymously, define nuances of issues, vote on items, and craft consensus-based recommendations during discussions of the complex and controversial customer service, communication and operations issues. Use of the county's GDSC enabled the task force to aggressively proceed with reviewing issues and determining its recommendations. Input from the GDSC process is included in the minutes of the October 2004 through April 2005 meetings. See Appendix B for the minutes of all SWTF meetings.



Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are the result of considerable research; dialog among the task force members; discussions with collection companies at their quarterly meetings; input from residents, community groups, and via email links from the webpage; and other sources who wished to comment. The recommendations in some cases support work that was already done as part of the development of the Solid Waste Management Plan, while others require additional work on the part of county staff or the collection companies. The recommendations are the result of consensus of the members of the task force.

A few issues have multiple recommendations and others have none. In some instances, after a thorough review of the issues, the SWTF recommended to continue with the current practices or policies. In those instances, no additional recommendation is made.

The SWTF agreed that its significant contributions to the improvement of residential waste collection include:

- facilitating the development of Quality Customer Service Standards to which many collection companies have already subscribed;
- emphasizing communication enhancements among the collection companies, the county, and their customers;
- advocating for increased recycling in the county, both for residents and businesses, and identifying other environmental issues that need to be resolved in the future; and

- validating the county's lead role in disaster operations and in operating the county's disposal facilities that allow for a more level playing field among private collection companies.

Chart

The following chart summarizes the SWTF's recommendations. Each recommendation is referenced by the chapter in which the discussion occurs.

SUMMARY OF SOLID WASTE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

CUSTOMER SERVICE (C)

Issue	Recommendation
Missed Collections	C-1. Residential waste collection companies should respond to missed collections within one business day, where response means contacting the customer but not necessarily resolving the issue.
Size And Volume Of Brush	C-2. County staff should modify Chapter 109 throughout to clearly distinguish brush from yard waste. To aid in these changes, the SWTF recommends that brush be defined as the woody waste, sticks and twigs that result from normal household pruning of trees and bushes. Brush to be collected should be no longer than 4 feet in length, no greater than 4 inches in diameter, with no individual piece or bundle weighing more than 50 pounds. Christmas trees should remain exempt from the size limitations for brush collection.
Rate Increases Should Be Included In Rate Increase Announcements	C-3. County staff should change the Fairfax County Code § 109-5-8 to require collection companies to include the amount of the increase in the notice of a rate increase that is given at least 30 days prior to its implementation.
Strategy For Emergencies	C-4. County staff should take the lead during emergencies to coordinate cleanup efforts countywide. C-5. Waste collection companies should work with their customers first to resolve emergency issues. C-6. Waste collection companies should, if they have the capacity, voluntarily work with the county in performing cleanup efforts countywide. If collectors serve other than their customers, they should be reimbursed for their services by the county.
Service Level Agreement	C-7. Residential waste collection companies and the Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling are encouraged to adopt and meet the Quality Customer Service Standards. They should use the standards when communicating with customers and in training their employees. Communities and homeowners associations contracting for collection services should reference these standards in their agreements.



ENVIRONMENTAL (E)

Issue	Recommendation
Plastic Versus Paper Bags For Collection Of Yard Waste	<p>E-1. County staff should develop an educational campaign directed at encouraging citizens to voluntarily use paper bags for yard waste so that more of the material can be recycled.</p> <p>E-2. County staff should continue to evaluate whether more stringent restrictions are needed about how yard waste is collected in the future.</p>
Separate Collection Of Yard Waste Within HOAs That Have Grounds Maintenance Contracts	<p>E-3. County staff should continue the existing exemption on a site-specific basis that allows small amounts of yard waste to be disposed in the regular trash when there is a general ground maintenance contract in place with the HOA.</p> <p>E-4. Residential waste collection companies for HOAs with an exemption should continue to decide how much homeowner yard waste is acceptable as part of the regular trash service.</p> <p>E-5. County staff should develop educational materials that encourage HOAs to process their homeowner yard waste on-site and encourage landscape firms to use the resulting mulch to the maximum extent possible.</p> <p>E-6. County staff should develop educational materials that collection companies can disseminate to their customers about backyard recycling and community composting.</p> <p>E-7. County staff should provide periodic sales of backyard composters and encourage residents to manage their own yard waste.</p>
E-waste	<p>E-8. County staff should continue to host periodic community events to collect e-waste and remove it from the waste stream, and encourage other public/private partnerships to recycle e-waste.</p> <p>E-9. County staff should add information about e-waste recycling, including definitions and a list of e-waste recycling opportunities to the county's webpage.</p> <p>.</p>
Removing NiCad Batteries from Waste Stream	<p>E-10. County staff should expand its partnership with the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation to publicize its existing program for accepting NiCad and rechargeable batteries at retailers for further recycling and removal from the waste stream.</p> <p>E-11. Waste collection companies, the county and retailers should help disseminate information about the program to their customers through coordinated public outreach messages.</p>



OPERATIONS (O)

Issue	Recommendation
Unified Recycling Activities	<p>O-1. County staff should develop enhanced recycling educational materials using various media to illustrate unified recycling countywide. The materials should address source reduction and reuse, what to recycle, how to recycle correctly, and how to purchase recycled products to close the loop. The materials should also be provided to the collectors in a camera-ready format, suitable for companies to add their names and logos prior to distributing to the customers. Finally, the standardized materials should be in multiple languages and advertised in the various language media.</p> <p>O-2. County staff should introduce additional recycling materials for curbside collection all at once instead of incrementally.</p> <p>O-3. County staff should support the establishment of new recycling facilities within the county including yard waste composting sites to handle the increased amounts of recyclable materials.</p>
Enforcement Issues	<p>O-4. County staff should explore administrative remedies that would allow more efficient enforcement of Foothill County Code Chapter 109 provisions, which may include seeking additional authority from the General Assembly.</p> <p>O-5. County staff should consider publishing a list of collection companies who receive violations, much like the Health Department publicizes a list of health code violations. Collection companies not receiving violations could then monitor their compliance with the code.</p>
Process for Procurement of County Contracts	<p>O-6. County staff should assess the feasibility of dividing sanitary districts into multiple contracts and the impact of multiple contracts on competition and homeowners. Currently the recycling collection is performed by one vendor for the approximately 42,000 homes in the sanitary districts. It is recognized that one company still may win multiple awards and that consolidation may occur.</p> <p>O-7. County staff should continue to notify collection companies of upcoming solicitations in monthly newsletters and quarterly collectors meetings.</p> <p>O-8. Waste collection companies offering to perform work for the county should subscribe to the proposed Quality Customer Service Standards.</p>



COMMUNICATION (COMM)

Issue	Recommendation
County's Role in Communication	<p>COMM-1. County staff should modify the county's website home page to show a new Subject Area entitled "Trash and Recycling" which would directly connect users to existing information.</p> <p>COMM-2. County staff should develop a methodology to allow webpage links from the county's solid waste web page to the collection companies that are permitted to operate by the county.</p> <p>COMM-3. County staff should continue to take the lead role in disseminating information about the county's solid waste and recycling policies and procedures using multiple communication channels.</p> <p>COMM-4. County staff should expand its use of Channel 16 to disseminate information about the county's solid waste management program.</p> <p>COMM-5. County staff should add a link from the Community Association Manual on its website to the Trash and Recycling webpage.</p>

Overview of Customer Service Issues

Customer service was the primary issue that the Board of Supervisors asked the SWTF to examine and resolve. In responding to that charge, the SWTF used a similar process for understanding customer service issues as it used for studying all the issues. The task force researched information on complaint categories, scrutinized current practices, and sought proposals and suggestions for improvements from residential waste collection companies and community leaders. Given the number and complexity of some of the issues, the task force used the county's GroupSystems software and the GDSC to examine them thoroughly and to develop recommendations that would improve customer service throughout the county.

A significant accomplishment of the SWTF was facilitating and encouraging the development of a customer service document that collection companies could commit to use with their customers. The SWTF found that the critical element in delivering good customer service was for collection companies to respond quickly to the concerns of their customers. Enhancing communication coupled with a commitment from the collection companies to meet or exceed their obligations became the basis for the Quality Customer Service Program, which the SWTF strongly endorsed. That program will be a voluntary initiative, developed through a joint effort of the Solid Waste Task Force, the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, solid waste collection firms operating in the county, and the Fairfax County Solid Waste Management Program.

The heart of the Quality Customer Service Program is a list of service standards that provides customers with a general understanding of waste collection and recycling practices and set their expectations for the quality of service they should be receiving. Collection companies that participate in this program are committed to providing their customers with a high level of service for their solid waste needs. This commitment will enhance safe, timely and environmentally sound waste collection, and should increase customer satisfaction.

Improvements in environmental standards and goals, equipment limitations, safety standards and labor guidelines have resulted in a specialized array of collection and disposal practices that appear unusual to some residents. The goal is to provide residents with a better understanding of current collection practices, the nature of the services that are available and the costs associated with these services, and to ensure that residents are satisfied with the reliability of the services for which they subscribe.

All solid waste collection companies operating in Fairfax County are required to be permitted by the county on an annual basis, including being bonded, inspected, and insured. Collectors must also operate within the requirements of Fairfax County Code Chapter 109 at all times.

Fairfax County is responsible for enforcing compliance with its waste collection activities under the county code. That code is available at the county's website: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash/recyclingtrash.htm>. While the county supports the customer service standards, it cannot enforce them under existing code. Those standards are simply voluntary statements by the collection companies of how they wish to provide services to their customers.

Residents can review a list of all solid waste collection firms permitted to operate in Fairfax County at the county's website: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash.htm. See Appendix C for a complete list of the quality customer service standards. The names of collection companies that agree to these standards will also be maintained on the county's website. Additionally, the county will annually ask collection firms to renew their commitment to the customer service standards at permit renewal time before continuing their posting to the website.

The SWTF explored the following customer service issues and developed recommended actions for improving them.

Frequency of Service

Discussion. This issue addresses the concern of whether all residents in the county had access to residential waste collectors who will provide the frequency of service desired by residents. County code requires that waste be collected at least weekly; the county collects weekly in the sanitary districts. Private companies offer a range of collection frequencies from daily to weekly. After discussing this topic, the SWTF agreed there were a sufficient number of private collectors to serve county residents; there were few barriers to market entry for collection companies; and most residents have the opportunity to choose their frequency of collection.

The Fairfax County Code § 109-5-3 clearly establishes a baseline for collection frequency of once a week collection for refuse and a separate collection of recyclables. The SWTF does not recommend changing the code at this time. If some customers wanted to have more frequent service and are willing to pay for it, the SWTF does not want to come between businesses and their customers by dictating a required frequency of service for everyone.

Missed Collections

Discussion. Missed collections are a frequent service complaint heard by both county staff and the Board of Supervisors during the public comment period about

the Solid Waste Management Plan. SWTF members discussed the impact on customers of missed collections and explored the reasons for missed collections, such as having the waste set out improperly or too late for the collection. Most SWTF members agreed that customers want to have missed collections corrected within 24 hours. The possibility of imposing fines on collectors who have a large number of missed collections was then considered. However, that issue raised many questions including the following: what is an appropriate number or percentage of missed collections; who would collect and maintain the data needed to support a penalty system; what would the penalties be; and how would the penalties be enforced. The county does not currently have the resources to provide such oversight; more importantly some SWTF members did not want the county involved in imposing fines and penalties. Collection companies should already be resolving their customer service issues as part of good business practices. The companies could voluntarily expand their communication with customers to define their missed collection policy and any penalties or guarantees they wish to impose on themselves.

The SWTF further discussed the possible development of guidelines about missed collections. Such guidelines could be used as model contract language for community associations and residents contracting with collection companies for residential collection. Ultimately, the SWTF decided that providing such model contract language was not a function for county staff because the information could be obtained in the county-prepared publication Community Associations Manual which is available at the county's website:

http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dtcs/consserv/community_assn_manual.htm.

The SWTF also considered crafting a voluntary service level agreement or standard that collection companies could subscribe to and share with their customers. This conceptual agreement would state the service expectations and possible penalties for noncompliance. Some of the components identified for potential incorporation to the quality customer service standard could include:

- Answer the phone during operational hours or an automated answering service.
- Provide a phone message stating if collection operations are delayed or cancelled, so that customers could know the status of collections.
- Improve communications between the company and the customer.
- Pick up missed collections within a specific number of business days.

SWTF members considered the idea of a county-sponsored phone line for reporting and tracking of missed collections. However, they concluded that the expense and number of associated administrative questions made such a phone line impractical.

Recommendation:

C-1. Residential waste collection companies should respond to missed collections within one business day, where response means contacting the customer but not necessarily resolving the issue.

Competition

Discussion. Competition among collection companies and the free market system are important principles that the SWTF supports. While members wanted to ensure that all residents have access to collection services, they believe that the free market system will motivate collection companies to expand and offer services to areas that may be underserved. County residents have access to a variety of service options, such as using county collection in a sanitary district, hiring a private collection company, or taking their trash to a citizen's disposal facility. Informed customers will choose the service that best meets their needs.

Information about the availability of collection companies, services provided, and contact numbers is maintained on the county's website. Collectors can also be found by calling the county's solid waste program at 703-324-5230, where a database by zip code is maintained identifying what areas are served by each collection company.

One of the components that has sustained competition in Fairfax County is the fact that the county government owns, manages and operates the disposal facilities. The long term viability of a market-driven system depends on the county continuing to provide the disposal facilities. The county's policies offer a level playing field for collection and disposal companies so that large and smaller companies can compete for business within the community and pay the same disposal fees whether they dispose of large or small amounts of waste.

The SWTF discussed at length the option of the county assuming responsibility for contracting residential waste collection services for all county residents, but it rejected this option. At this time, additional recommendations will not assure that all residents have access to all service options or all companies serving Fairfax County. However, competition will encourage collectors to move into market areas where business opportunities arise. Following these discussions, the SWTF concluded that the current free market system with competition among collectors provides residents with the best prospects for having multiple options for collection services. It also identified few significant barriers for companies to enter into the market, even for small businesses.

Weight of Collection Containers

Discussion. This issue arose from the public concern voiced by residents during the preparation of the Solid Waste Management Plan about the weight of trash containers that collection company employees must lift. Fairfax County Code §



109-5-2 establishes an upper limit of 50 pounds per container or individual piece of waste that can be collected. After a thorough discussion of the various concerns about the weight of collection containers, from the collectors and customers' perspectives, the SWTF agreed it was inappropriate to change the criteria at this time. The amount of waste that companies are willing to allow their workers to collect remains a business decision and one that they should communicate to their customers as part of an ongoing dialogue.

Size and Volume of Brush

Discussion. Currently the Fairfax County Code § 109-1-1 defines yard debris as "... the organic fraction of municipal solid waste that consists of grass clippings, leaves, brush, and tree and shrub trimmings arising from general landscape maintenance." Although the code includes brush in the definition of yard debris, brush is not separately defined. The Fairfax County Recycling Program Requirements of February 2003 direct that brush be collected separately for recycling year-round, while yard waste was required to be collected only from April 1 to December 24 annually. The task force discussed at length the need to more clearly define brush and yard waste as well as whether brush and yard waste should be collected separately for recycling at all.

In defining brush, collectors stated that brush resulting from storm damage or tree removal was not part of normal household waste. If the brush was produced from a tree removal, then the resulting woody debris should be handled by a tree service or as a special collection for which the collectors could charge extra. The collectors typically define brush as sticks, twigs and small branches that are the product from normal pruning of household trees and bushes.



They contend that large amounts of brush should not be part of the regular trash collection. For purposes of this report, the SWTF defines brush as woody waste that results from the pruning of trees and bushes. It further defines yard waste as vegetative matter, grass clippings, and leaves that are produced during general landscape maintenance.

The SWTF concluded that yard waste and brush should be collected separately and recycled for several reasons:

- Recycling brush and yard waste maintains capacity at the waste-to-energy facility for materials that cannot be composted.
- Recycling allows brush and yard waste to be composted and recycled into useful mulching material.
- Fairfax County is required by the Commonwealth of Virginia to maintain its recycling rate above 25 percent and if brush and yard waste were not recycled, the county would probably not meet this State mandate.



The discussion then moved to the size of brush to be collected as part of a regular waste collection operation. Brush that is too long, too large in diameter, or too heavy, could jam the collection truck's compaction system. As a result, brush needs to be cut to a size that can be handled safely, efficiently, and effectively by waste collection companies. In addition, if too much brush is set out for collection, then the SWTF concluded it should be handled by

companies with special crane equipment such as a tree service. It also agreed that a few changes should be made to Fairfax County Code Chapter 109 to more clearly define the size of brush to be collected as regular household waste.

Finally, the SWTF concluded that residential waste collectors have the responsibility to define how they will collect brush, as long as they comply with the provisions of Fairfax County Code § 109-5-2. They also are responsible for determining the maximum volume of brush they would collect as well as establishing their prices for special collections.

The SWTF took several votes using the GroupSystems software to determine what, if any, recommendations should be made about the size and volume of brush to be collected. The task force members agreed that the collectors operating in the county should continue to be required to pick up brush as a regular residential waste collection and they should follow the requirements in Fairfax County Code §§ 109-2-1 about source separation and 109-5-2 for maximum amount, dimensions and weight of materials to be collected.

Recommendation:

C-2. County staff should modify Chapter 109 throughout to clearly distinguish brush from yard waste. To aid in those changes, the SWTF recommends that brush be defined as the woody waste, sticks and twigs that result from normal household pruning of trees and bushes. Brush to be collected should be no longer than 4 feet in length, no greater than 6 inches in diameter, with no individual piece or bundle weighing more than 50 pounds. Christmas trees should remain exempt from the size limitations for brush collection.

Rate Increase Amounts In Rate Increase Announcements

Discussion. As specified in Fairfax County Code § 109-5-8, notice of a rate increase for waste collection must be given at least 30 days prior to implementing the increase. The code does not require that the specific amount of the increase be included in the notice. The SWTF conducted a thorough discussion of whether rate increase notices should include the actual amount of the rate increase. Most

members stated that collection companies should provide the amount of the increase and the rationale for it as a customer service strategy.

Recommendation:

C-3. County staff should change the Fairfax County Code § 109-5-8 to require collection companies to include the amount of the increase in the notice of a rate increase that is given at least 30 days prior to its implementation.

Safety Issues (traffic congestion, unsafe driving on streets)

Discussion. SWTF members engaged in a comprehensive discussion of various safety issues involved with multiple trucks collecting waste on residential streets. Those issues included trucks zigzagging across streets to collect on both sides of neighborhood streets and speeding in neighborhoods. While these are important safety concerns, most SWTF members thought the resolution of these issues was beyond their scope and rested with law enforcement. Collection companies should voluntarily agree to operate safely on neighborhood streets as part of their quality customer service standards.

Extra Charges for Special Collections

Discussion. In examining the issue of special collections, the SWTF found that



what constitutes special collections varies significantly among collection companies. Most companies charge separately for bulky items or large volumes of waste that are considered special collections, unless such services are part of a community contract. The SWTF agreed that the decision to charge for special collections was a business matter between the collection companies and their customers. Moreover,

Fairfax County Code § 109-5-10 allows collection companies to charge separately for special collections.

Strategy for Emergencies

Discussion: This issue addresses how much private residential waste collection companies could and should be involved in debris clean up and waste collection following an emergency, disaster or violent weather event. The SWTF concluded that the county has the critical role in the delivery of services during emergencies. Further, the county's Emergency Operation Plan already describes how the county would operate during various types of emergencies. In keeping with that plan, county staff would designate a debris removal coordinator, who would keep collectors informed and work with them to maximize overall collection efforts.



County staff should also review the emergency procedures periodically during quarterly meetings with collectors to ensure that collectors are aware of various emergency and disaster responses before an emergency occurs. It was the sense of the SWTF that the county should be the central coordination and communication conduit for all types of emergencies.

Bell Haven area after Hurricane Isabel

Many members also thought it was difficult to focus on specific recommendations because there were so many unanswered questions, such as what constitutes an emergency (declared and undeclared emergencies or disasters); what types of emergencies could be expected (weather, natural, man-made, or terrorists); whether the county would pay collectors for their services; and whether the county should lift restrictions for collectors during these emergencies.

The SWTF emphasized that garbage and trash related to health and safety situations should be removed and disposed of quickly by the regular trash services during emergencies. Some collectors on the task force stated that brush removal and recycling should not be a priority in a widespread disaster. Other members thought brush was the main problem in many weather-related disasters. The collectors countered that they were not tree companies and were not equipped to handle amounts of brush significantly above county code requirements.



Some of the collector representatives further stated that they already view emergencies from a community-wide perspective and will support their customers to the extent of their equipment and resources. However, these representatives also stated that the county should accommodate them by relaxing restrictions, increasing operating hours, or lowering tip fees during emergencies. County staff responded that lowering tip fees during such emergencies was not feasible since yard waste disposal facilities were external to the county. They further stated that hours at county-controlled facilities were extended following a recent storm emergency and would be accommodated in the future, if needed.

Many of the issues about emergencies go beyond trash and debris removal such as handling of hazardous materials. When a state of emergency is declared, collectors need to know how they can help the community recover. Increased education about emergency issues could be provided by county staff during the quarterly collectors meetings.

County staff also wanted to develop a mechanism for collectors to be available, as needed and on a voluntary basis, to help in coordinated cleanup efforts. The collectors could provide whatever additional capacity they had after serving their customers to help with general community cleanup work. However, the collectors responded by noting that they needed some mechanism to receive compensation for their efforts. They further stated they are not generally equipped to provide tree or construction/demolition/debris removal services. Clearly, the county's coordinator for debris management will need to work with the collection companies to use their extra capacity in the countywide cleanup efforts.

Members of the SWTF attended a quarterly collectors meeting in January 2005, to discuss this issue. Again, collectors stated they were willing to help community cleanup efforts, if they had the excess capacity after serving their customers and if they were paid for their efforts.

Recommendations:

C-4. County staff should take the lead during emergencies to coordinate cleanup efforts countywide.

C-5. Waste collection companies should work with their customers first to resolve emergency issues.

C-6. Waste collection companies should, if they have the capacity, voluntarily work with the county in performing cleanup efforts countywide. If collectors serve other than their customers, they should be reimbursed for their services by the county.

Service Level Agreement

Discussion. The SWTF defines a service level agreement as a set of quality customer service standards that the collection companies would share with their customers. The customers would rely on the standards to define their expectations for good customer service when selecting a collection company.

Several SWTF members agreed there was value for collectors to create a voluntary charter for customer service describing how they would provide collection services to their customers. A subcommittee of the SWTF then met with the collectors to create a draft customer service program that defined initial quality customer service standards. County staff mailed a copy of the program to every collection company so they could become familiar with its concepts. The SWTF next facilitated a meeting on February 9, 2005, where all collection firms operating in Fairfax County were invited to attend and discuss the draft program. Nine collectors, along with county staff, participated in the meeting that was held at the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce.

These discussions were fruitful and resulted in the Quality Customer Service Standards in Appendix C. The standards are displayed on the county's website and all collectors who subscribe to the standards will be identified on that site. Customers throughout the county should benefit from this concise statement of service levels and expectations when they are searching for a collection company. The standards may also be distributed by collectors to their customers. County staff intends to sign the standards and use them in communicating with their customers in the sanitary districts.

During the February 9 meeting, the collection companies also discussed the fragile nature of voluntary customer service standards and explored possible methods of reporting and tracking company satisfaction. No method for reporting and tracking collector performance was agreed upon, but the SWTF decided to publish the standards and rely upon the collection companies to maintain their own compliance with the standards. Customers will have the ultimate enforcement tool by changing collection companies if they are dissatisfied with a company's service performance.

Recommendation:

C-7. Residential waste collection companies and the Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling are encouraged to adopt and meet the Quality Customer Service Standards. They should use the standards when communicating with their customers and in training their employees. Communities and homeowners associations contracting for collection services should reference these standards in their agreements.

Overview of Environmental Issues

Sheila Roit, in her role as Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) representative, provided background information about the status of Fairfax County's environment. She offered a history of the Clean Air Act of 1990 and its implications for the county, and she outlined the potential impact of pending federal legislation on the county. She supplied the SWTF with recent reports from the county's Environmental Coordinating Committee's Air Quality Subcommittee, located online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/opa/airquality/cleanairmenu.pdf>. She also shared comments from the EQAC report discussing water quality, noise, hazardous materials, light, and other general environmental issues in the county, also available online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/eqac/report/>.

The SWTF used this information as a basis for discussing the following environmental issues concerning residential waste collection.

Air Emissions from Trucks and Use of Special Fuels

Discussion. The discussion focused on the possibility of collectors consolidating routes as a way to reduce collection truck traffic on community streets, and the use of less-polluting fuels for collection vehicles. Most of the SWTF members agreed that having competition among collectors was important and that the very nature of competition necessitated multiple trucks on the streets. The county code requires separate collection of waste and recycling materials, which also results in additional collection trucks on streets. However, collection companies can choose to collect waste and recyclables in the same vehicle and still meet county code requirements, as long as the materials are separated.



The SWTF unanimously endorsed exploring other environmental initiatives for reducing truck emissions such as the use of alternative fuels and fuel additives. One proposed alternative was to allow private collection companies to use county sites to purchase lower emissions fuels. However, a legal review by the County Attorney's Office revealed that the county currently lacks legal authority to purchase fuel for resale to private collection companies or to sell its fuel to a

private company. Enabling legislation would be necessary to take these actions. Without considering such legislation, the SWTF suggested that the county should explore other options to encourage the use of alternative fuels by private collection companies. County staff should continue to track the development of alternative fuels and make the results of their research available to residential waste collection companies for their consideration. Moreover, county staff and collection companies should continue to explore fuel additives to reduce emissions from waste collection vehicles.

Collection and Recycling of Materials

Discussion. The SWTF concluded that the collection of recyclables is a health and safety requirement as well as a quality-of-life feature. The issue of whether waste and recyclable materials, such as yard waste, should be collected in the same vehicle was also debated. The discussion centered on whether there was a need to collect yard waste separately. The sense of the SWTF was that the current system of separate collections of yard waste and solid waste was needed to meet the State-mandated recycling rate and to extend the capacity of the Energy/Resource Recovery Facility to process solid waste in the future.

Plastic Versus Paper Bags for Collection of Yard Waste and Leaves

Discussion. The pros and cons of using plastic versus paper bags for collection of yard waste were discussed from the perspective of collection companies, yard waste processors, and residents. Generally, the collection companies did not favor one method over the other, but they agreed that paper bags were strong and would reduce confusion about whether a plastic bag contained trash or yard waste. They further saw a potential benefit of being able to print customer outreach information on the paper bags.

From the yard waste processor perspective, paper bags are preferred because about 25 percent of the yard waste currently collected in plastic bags cannot be recycled because the plastic bags get caught in the debagging machinery and must be disposed in a landfill. A major local composting facility has asked the county's Business Advisory Committee on Solid Waste to recommend the use of paper kraft bags for collection of yard waste. The facility also indicated that it may not take yard waste in plastic bags in the future.

Members of the SWTF have many differing opinions about the use of paper bags: they may not be readily available, they cost more than plastic bags, they are heavy and awkward to fill, and they remove choice from the residents. Several neighboring jurisdictions—City of Fairfax, City of Falls Church, Town of Herndon, Arlington and Loudoun Counties—already require paper bags for yard waste collection. These jurisdictions are the county's major competitors for access to the

limited yard waste recycling capacity in the region. In the future, the county may find itself without a local composting facility willing to take waste in plastic bags.

Although the SWTF examined the environmental benefits of using paper, some members expressed concern that residents would balk at the proposition of banning plastic bags. Given the disparity of opinions about the value of paper versus plastic bags, the SWTF asked county staff to research the use of paper bags in other jurisdictions and provide additional information. That research is located in Appendix D.



County staff reported that the reason many jurisdictions began composting yard waste was because they were banned from sending yard waste to landfills. Most of the local jurisdictions that banned plastic bags for yard waste did so years ago.

When local programs implemented paper bag collection of yard waste, they received mixed reactions from customers. Some customers liked it and others hated it. As expected, the amount of rejected material at the composting facilities dropped significantly.

Recommendations:

E-1. County staff should develop an educational campaign directed at encouraging citizens to voluntarily use paper bags for yard waste so that more of the material can be recycled.

E-2. County staff should continue to evaluate whether more stringent restrictions are needed about how yard waste is collected in the future.

Separate Collection of Yard Waste within HOAs That Have Grounds Maintenance Contracts

Discussion. Some homeowners associations (HOAs) have been granted an exemption from the requirement for separate pickup of yard waste by trash collection companies. This exemption was often based on the presumption that the grounds maintenance companies were disposing of most of the yard waste as part of their contracts. It also allowed the trash collectors to accept “minimal amounts” of yard waste in the regular trash from homeowners. Many of the HOAs with this exemption are townhome or condominium complexes with small private yards that generate little yard waste. They also have little or no room for composting, so what yard waste is produced could be disposed of easily in the regular trash.

A collection company representative asked the county to determine how much of this type of yard waste was permitted to be put in with trash. No decision was made at this time about the amount of allowable yard waste. The SWTF wants to continue with the current system and encourage homeowners in these HOAs to process their yard waste on-site or within the community. The county could provide educational materials to collection companies for dissemination to their customers about grasscycling, backyard composting, and other topics. One community (Hallcrest Heights) is working with the county to design and implement a “model community composting” project which would process yard waste on-site and integrate the efforts of its grounds maintenance contractor with those of its residential waste collector. The county also sponsors periodic sales of backyard composters that could be used within some HOAs.

Recommendations:

E-3. County staff should continue the existing exemption on a site-specific basis that allows small amounts of yard waste to be disposed in the regular trash when there is a general ground maintenance contract in place with an HOA.

E-4. Residential waste collection companies for HOAs with an exemption should continue to decide how much homeowner yard waste is acceptable as part of the regular trash service.

E-5. County staff should develop educational materials that encourage HOAs to process their homeowner yard waste on site and encourage landscape firms to use the resulting mulch to the maximum extent possible.

E-6. County staff should develop educational materials that collection companies can disseminate to their customers about backyard recycling and community composting.

E-7. County staff should provide periodic sales of backyard composters and encourage residents to manage their own yard waste.

Electronic Waste (e-waste)



e-waste. The county's Recycling Drop-Off Centers are not staffed and so routine

Discussion. County staff has traditionally held very successful community events aimed at collecting computer monitors and other electronic equipment. Although the processing of e-waste in the county's Energy/Resource Recovery Facility is a safe alternative, projections show that the amount of e-waste is continuing to increase yearly. The county needs a more formal policy about disposing of

collection of e-waste at these sites is currently not a viable option. Moreover, many jurisdictions across the United States have banned disposal of e-waste in landfills or incinerators.

Currently, the county partners with ServiceSource, a nonprofit agency, to attend the community e-waste recycling events. ServiceSource employees help collect the monitors and electronics, collect fees from customers, and provide tax donation documentation. They transport the electronics to their workshop in Alexandria, where workers dismantle and properly dispose of the e-waste. In the future, a single agency or company may not be able to handle all the e-waste generated in the county. The sense of the SWTF was that the current system of periodic events to remove enough e-waste from the waste stream is working at this time. Additional public outreach efforts need to be directed toward encouraging residents to recycle their computers at these events. More information about e-waste recycling should be added to the county's website. Eventually, a ban on disposing of e-waste may be needed, but not at this time.

Recommendations:

E-8. County staff should continue to host periodic community events to collect e-waste and remove it from the waste stream, and encourage other public/private partnerships to recycle e-waste.

E-9. County staff should add information about e-waste recycling, including definitions and a list of e-waste recycling opportunities to the county's webpage.

Removing Nickel Cadmium (NiCad) Batteries from the Waste Stream

Discussion. The SWTF examined various ways to effectively remove nickel-cadmium (NiCad) and other rechargeable batteries from the waste stream, but it focused on three alternatives: curbside collection, collection at the two county solid waste complexes at I-66 and I-95, and partnership with the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC). The SWTF concluded that curbside collection was too expensive to implement and collection at the solid waste complexes was not especially convenient for residents, since most people would not travel to a facility just to dispose of a few small batteries. Partnering with RBRC was viewed as the most viable and low-cost alternative since virtually the only cost would be county staff time. RBRC already has developed promotional materials and established collection points through agreements with companies such as Radio Shack, Wal-Mart, Target, Best Buy and other retailers that sell new batteries. The RBRC also covers the cost of shipping, processing and disposal. With the county publicizing this program, residents would learn of the availability and need for recycling rechargeable batteries. The SWTF further supported continuing to implement the strategies identified in the Solid Waste Management Plan to remove NiCad batteries from the waste stream. Collection companies, retailers and the media could help disseminate information about the battery

recycling program. However, this effort could require support from the county's General Fund.

Recommendations:

E-10. County staff should expand its partnership with the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation to publicize its existing program for accepting NiCad and rechargeable batteries at retailers for further recycling and removal from the waste stream.

E-11. Waste collection companies, the county and retailers should help disseminate information about the program to their customers through coordinated public outreach messages.

Overview of Operations Issues

Operations issues cover a broad range of topics dealing with how collection services are conducted in the county. Those topics run the full gamut of operational matters from how collection vehicles receive permits to the role of the county as a waste collector, the county's role in enforcement of county code to the contracting process for county collection services. As with previous issues, the task force researched the topics, met with collectors, and developed strategies for improving waste collection operations in the county. SWTF members also attended quarterly county-sponsored meetings with the permitted collection companies to understand their views on the issues. These meetings further enabled members to obtain a more detailed understanding of the solid waste collection business in Fairfax County.

County staff also encouraged the collection companies to be involved in the deliberations of the SWTF. In response to that encouragement, several companies attended the monthly SWTF meetings and their representatives offered ideas and suggestions that were considered when the SWTF developed its final recommendations.

The SWTF hosted a meeting with collection companies at the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce in February 2005, to discuss and develop the Quality Customer Service Standards that many of the collection companies will use to describe their customer service practices.

The SWTF paid particular attention to the impact of county regulations as barriers keeping private companies out of the marketplace or restricting competition within the marketplace. The consensus of the SWTF was that none of these operational items, either singly or collectively, presents a barrier to entry into the marketplace, particularly for small businesses.

Tour of Facilities

County staff conducted a tour of local disposal and recycling facilities for SWTF members. The purpose of the tour was to familiarize members with various sites that are not routinely open to the public as well as to provide opportunities for

researching environmental and operations issues. On September 1, 2004, SWTF members toured 7 local disposal and recycling facilities. The facilities were a mix of county-owned and private operations:

- Loudoun Composting, LLC
- Capitol Fiber, Inc.
- Newington - County Collection Office
- Lorton Construction/Demolition/Debris Landfill
- I-95 Complex
- Energy/Resource Recovery Facility
- I-66 Transfer Station



Details about each of the sites are located in Appendix E.

The following discussion and recommendations are the result of extensive conversations and analysis completed by the SWTF to determine how residential waste collection operations should be conducted in the future. One of the biggest benefits of this analysis, beyond the findings of fact, was the increased awareness of all the stakeholders about the complexity of the integrated waste management system in Fairfax County and the importance of all stakeholders doing their part to keep it operating effectively in the future.

Inspections and Permitting of Vehicles

Discussion. Fairfax County Code §§ 109-3-1, 109-4-1, 109-4-2, and 109-4-5 require that all collectors operating in Fairfax County be permitted by the county. Being permitted includes an annual inspection of each vehicle, and obtaining or renewing a bond. Much of the SWTF's discussion concerned the nature of the inspections performed by county staff and whether the permitting process was too onerous on collection companies. The purpose of the permit process is to identify all collection vehicles for tracking and billing purposes and to ensure each vehicle passes a safety inspection.

The SWTF concluded that the permitting process is necessary for the county to manage the disposal process, account for waste disposed, and bill companies for using the disposal facilities. The process further supports the county's information management needs and is not difficult for collection companies to meet. The costs of permitting of collection vehicles (\$80 per truck) and obtaining the required bonding are simply costs of doing business for the collection companies.

County staff completes the permitting process in May and June of each year, and even travel to collection companies' parking areas when requested to inspect the vehicles. The county's permit office is typically fully staffed during the 2 months of permitting to shorten wait times.

Assurance Bond Policy

Discussion. Fairfax County Code § 109-4 -5 requires waste collection companies to post a bond for each waste collection truck. The bond ensures that the disposal bills for that truck will be paid, or if necessary, the county will have the short-term ability to pay for the collection of the waste from customers if the collection company is unable to provide the service. The SWTF discussion focused on the process of companies obtaining the county-required \$10,000 bond per vehicle. Since private bonding companies issue the bonds, the county cannot influence the cost charged or the process for obtaining a bond. The cost of the bond is based upon several factors including the credit history and stability of the collection company, the potential risk exposure to the bonding company, and trends in the overall waste industry. Risk and credit worthiness are significant factors in granting a bond to a collection company. Some bonding companies have recently raised their fees because of waste industry consolidations and the increased risk they have incurred.

If a collector cannot obtain a bond, the county already accepts alternative financial instruments in lieu of a bond to provide the needed measure of financial security. The county also allows payment schedules for companies that may have temporary cash flow problems. The SWTF determined that the cost of obtaining a \$10,000 bond is reasonable, between \$100 and \$200. The current permitting and bond process appear to be working well and so no changes are necessary.

Unified Recycling Activities

Discussion. SWTF members were very supportive of county staff developing a unified recycling message for all collectors to share with their curbside collection customers. They agreed that the county has the resources and general mission to educate the public about countywide recycling activities, how to recycle and what materials can be recycled. The collection companies could then personalize the materials and distribute the printed information to their customers.

The county plans to expand curbside collection of recyclables to include mixed paper, cardboard, and plastic bottles.

Voluntary participation in curbside collection of the new materials is planned to begin July 1, 2005, with mandatory participation planned for January 1, 2006. The expansion of the recycling program was discussed in the Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) that was adopted by the Board of Supervisors. This expanded recycling program offers county residents the opportunity to do most of their recycling curbside.

A collection company representative expressed concern about the existence of markets for the additional materials to be recycled. In addition, county staff will



need to determine if state or federal incentives are available to companies who want to become recyclers in the area. The increase in recyclable materials could even result in new business opportunities in the county. Recyclers that were contacted by SWTF members indicated they are adding capacity in anticipation of the enhanced recycling program included in the SWMP. Other local jurisdictions already require the recycling of materials (cardboard, mixed paper and plastic bottles) that Fairfax County plans to add. It was the opinion of county staff that finding markets for the additional materials will not be difficult, since recyclers are already marketing these materials.

Recommendations:

O-1. County staff should develop enhanced recycling educational materials using various media to illustrate unified recycling countywide. The materials should address source reduction and reuse, what to recycle, how to recycle items correctly, and how to purchase recycled products to close the loop. The materials should also be provided to the collectors in a camera-ready format, suitable for companies to add their names and logos prior to distributing to their customers. Finally, the standardized materials should be in multiple languages and advertised in the various language media.

O-2. County staff should introduce additional recycling materials for curbside collection all at once instead of incrementally.

O-3. County staff should support the establishment of new recycling facilities within the county including yard waste composting sites to handle the increased amounts of recyclable materials.

Enforcement Issues

Discussion. Fairfax County Code § 109-1-2 authorizes the county's Director of Public Works and Environmental Services to enforce its provisions. That authority has been delegated to the Director of the Division of Solid Waste Disposal and Resource Recovery and to the Director of the Division of Solid Waste Collection and Recycling. However, the SWTF notes that more significant penalties may be required to ensure compliance with some of the code's provisions. While county staff do not want to become the "trash police," they should be able to cite collectors for violations without using the onerous magistrate process currently required in Fairfax County Code § 109-1-3. The use of administrative sanctions could be very effective, if appropriate sanctions are identified.

The SWTF believes that the county staff should devise sanctions to deal with collection companies who do not comply with the code. The members have indicated they want violators of the code to be dealt with effectively (maybe even publicly) so that collection companies who comply with the code are acknowledged.

The SWTF also noted that many of the compliance issues under the county code would be moot if collectors subscribe to the proposed Quality Customer Service Standards developed as part of this task force's work. Many service questions or non-compliance incidents revolve around communication and expectations between collection companies and their customers. Most issues brought before the SWTF do not involve true code enforcement situations, but rather are derived from the contractual relationship between customers and collectors. In the best situation, the county cannot enforce the code beyond specified minimum levels of service. The proposed Quality Customer Service Standards are an attempt to describe service provision beyond the minimum levels and to address communication and expectations between collection companies and their customers. If customers receive poor service, they can change collection companies—the ultimate remedy or enforcement for violations of customer service expectations. However, it was noted that few of the residential collection firms operating in the county collect countywide.

Recommendations:

O-4. County staff should explore administrative remedies that would allow more efficient enforcement of Fairfax County Code Chapter 109 provisions, which may include seeking additional authority from the General Assembly.

O-5. County staff should consider publishing a list of collection companies who receive violations, much like the Health Department publicizes a list of health code violations. Collection companies not receiving violations could then market their compliance with the code.

Consequences of the County Getting Out of Direct Waste Collection in Sanitary Districts

Discussion. Given that the county currently provides direct waste collection services to about 15 percent of county residences located in sanitary districts, a member of the Board of Supervisors asked county staff to investigate the consequences of the county using private contractors for that service. The SWTF included this topic in its investigation of residential waste collection operations in the county, but it expanded the task to address whether the county should be involved at any level in providing waste collection services, contracted or not.



The Board of Supervisors establishes sanitary districts following a homeowner - initiated petition process and a public hearing. Homeowners in the sanitary districts pay for the collection services as a separate fee on their tax bill. Sanitary district services are provided by a mix of county and contracted employees. About 110 full-time county employees provide most of the waste collection services, while a private company collects the recyclables. Sanitary districts have once-a-week trash collection and once per week pick up of recyclable materials, including yard waste. The county provides special collections using specialized equipment beyond the regular trash collection vehicles. The county also operates a separate vacuum-leaf collection program for residents in leaf districts. County staff periodically analyzes the work requirements in sanitary districts and solicits contracts with private firms to perform the work. Appendix F shows the areas of the county that are currently in sanitary districts.

After the county has created a sanitary district to provide solid waste collection, it does not have the option to unilaterally discontinue that service without a petition from the residents to decreate the sanitary district. Unless the Board of Supervisors changes its policies and procedures or unless citizens petition to decreate a sanitary district, the only option for the county is to continue direct collection service or to solicit a contract for the services.

In analyzing the economic consequences of the county getting out of direct waste collection, the SWTF noted that the fees paid by customers cover the total cost of the county collection services. These fees are paid only by residents who receive the services; they do not come from the General Fund. The result is that there would be no impact on the county's General Fund if the county ended its direct waste collection.



Because of the complexity of the county's waste system, the SWTF further analyzed the positive and negative consequences of the county getting out of direct waste collection from the perspectives of county residents, private collection companies and the county's Solid Waste Management Program. This thorough approach yielded significant insights for SWTF members as they realized the value that each of the three perspectives added to the overall discussion. See Appendix B for a detailed summary of these discussions as part of the meeting minutes from the November 30 and December 14, 2004, task force meetings.

The SWTF considered several recommendations about the county's role in sanitary district waste collection operations. Four models were specifically explored to see what potential benefits they offer. Those models are summarized below:

- Maintaining the status quo in the sanitary districts

- Maintaining the sanitary districts but contracting for all the collection services with private collection companies
- Maintaining the sanitary districts but have private collections companies collect trash and recyclables and have the county continue brush, yard waste and special collections
- Maintaining the current number of sanitary districts without increasing the size of the districts or adding any new customers.

County staff should further assess whether the county should contract more of its collection services in the sanitary districts, recognizing that the county already contracts for many services performed in the sanitary districts.

Process for Procurement of County Contracts

Discussion. State procurement regulations determine the policies and procedures that the county uses in soliciting goods and services. Periodically, usually every 5 years, the county issues a solicitation asking private collection companies to submit proposals to collect recyclable materials or trash in the legally designated county sanitary districts.

Initially, a few SWTF members thought that the county's procurement process could place some collection companies at a disadvantage because a small company may not be able to provide collection services over all the sanitary districts, but could provide excellent services in a smaller area. However, county staff pointed out that the county uses the same procurement process for all its contracts and that it has no authority to set aside contracts for small or minority-owned businesses.

A SWTF member suggested that the sanitary districts could be split into smaller areas that could be individually bid. County staff explained that because the sanitary district process occurs twice each year, the county has little time to arrange for services after a sanitary district has been approved by the Board of Supervisors. For example, the latest sanitary district was approved in October for services to begin in January, 2005. This short timeframe does not allow sufficient time to competitively solicit proposals for each sanitary district. In addition, the cost of preparing a separate solicitation for each sanitary district would be prohibitively expensive, as would the administrative costs of monitoring several different contracts. The advantage of a single contract is that a firm, fixed price is set for at least a one-year period, which may not be possible if multiple contracts are issued.

One SWTF member asked if the task force could recommend developing a threshold for the number of new customers or set other parameters that when met would require the county to solicit for services in a new sanitary district. For example, if a block of 200 customers was expected to be added in a new sanitary district, the county could prepare a solicitation for that sanitary district and have it ready to publish as soon as the Board of Supervisors approved the creation of the sanitary district. However, if 200 new customers are added to various sanitary

districts throughout the county, it would not make sense to have a new solicitation; the additional customers could simply be added to the existing contract for the appropriate sanitary districts.

Recommendations:

O-6. County staff should assess the feasibility of dividing sanitary districts into multiple contracts and the impact of such contracts on competition and homeowners. Currently the recycling collection is performed by one vendor for the approximately 42,000 homes in the sanitary districts. It is recognized that one company still may win multiple awards, or that consolidation over time may occur.

O-7. County staff should continue to notify collection companies of upcoming solicitations in monthly newsletters and at quarterly collectors meetings.

O-8. Waste collection companies proposing to perform work for the county should subscribe to the proposed Quality Customer Service Standards.

Overview of the Communication Issues

Communication is a fundamental element of the discussion and recommendations presented in this report regarding customer service, environmental and operations issues. Central to the Quality Customer Service Standards is the need for collection companies to have written standards that they can share with their customers about how they intend to perform collection services. Some of the enhancements in the environmental chapter dealt with establishing better communications among the county, collection companies, homeowners associations, and county residents. In addition, communication supports the operation of the free market practices in the county, since residents must know their options when choosing a residential waste collection company. In the final analysis, the SWTF agreed that full and forthright communication is necessary for competition to support good customer service for county residents. Informed and educated consumers are the surest way to sustain and enhance a world-class integrated waste management system such as we have in Fairfax County.

Clear, effective communication is an objective of all parties involved in the preparation of this report. Since many of the customer service and operational issues can be attributed to breakdowns in communication, the SWTF considered incorporating discussions about communication within other chapters of this report. However, as the process evolved, it became clear to the members that resolving communication issues and establishing reasonable expectations are pivotal to resolving both current and future service issues. Because of its key importance, the SWTF agreed that ideas about improving communication warranted a separate chapter for discussion and recommendations.

Previous recommendations that involve improving communication will not be reproduced here. Instead, the SWTF presents suggestions and recommendations about the roles of various stakeholders in improving communications as a way of ensuring that Fairfax County makes satisfactory strides toward resolving its residential waste collection issues presented in this report. By definition improving communication means communicating more frequently and in more effective ways.

Fairfax County's Role in Communication

Discussion. Fairfax County has traditionally taken the lead role in providing countywide communication to the general public regarding solid waste policies and procedures within the county. The county works with collection companies and other groups to develop appropriate messages about new and existing countywide programs such as the expansion of curbside recycling. Its staff prepares brochures and flyers to educate residents and businesses about recycled materials required for collection and how to prepare the materials correctly for recycling. These materials are also made available to collectors for distribution to their customers. In addition, county staff continues to expand the amount of information maintained on its website to help residents understand the complexities and requirements of the integrated waste management system in Fairfax County. That website will become a focal point for the collection companies that adopt the proposed Quality Customer Service Standards.

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov>



The county's website already contains important information for collection companies and residents and it is updated frequently. However, the information regarding solid waste is difficult to find. The SWTF believes that the Subject Areas of the website (shown on the far right side of the website) should contain the subject

heading Trash and Recycling. This heading would make the subject matter more readily accessible. The current website requires users to know that the subject matter falls under Public Works and Utilities or Environment.

The SWTF emphasizes that frequent updating of information on this website is also critical, although county staff indicated that updates are made weekly to this site. The SWTF supported the county's continued role in maintaining the web-based information on solid waste, including providing links to collection companies operating in the county. While county staff has noted that the county's web administrators currently prohibit such links, the collection companies have obtained permits from the county to collect waste, and have signed contracts with the county to deliver waste. Allowing links to collection company websites would provide another means of facilitating better communication with residents and businesses.

The SWTF agreed that the county will not be the customer service interface between collection companies and their customers. However, the county's communication methods are well established and could incorporate features on how to reach collection companies. Various methods of communication could be used to deliver the county's communication messages including public service announcements, Channel 16, paid radio and TV ads, newspaper articles, and public affairs news releases and publications. The county's role in improving

communication should extend to improving compliance and reducing the need for enforcement actions. Minimally, the county's role should include:

- Coordinating future countywide communications regarding environmental, customer service, and operations issues.
- Continuing its regulatory enforcement role to ensure that collectors are aware of, and comply with, the county code.
- Providing the general public information about the collectors' Quality Customer Service Standards by enhancing its website.
- Satisfying collectors who request to have their websites linked to the county site.
- Maintaining a data base of zip codes served by collection companies that will assist residents who wish to find a collector, and placing the information on the county's website or other accessible location for residents.
- Communicating with collectors to facilitate recovery from disasters or emergencies, and supporting a voluntary service in which collection companies would subscribe to the county's emergency alert system. The system could keep collectors informed about weather and other events that activate the alert system.

Recommendations:

COMM-1. County staff should modify the county's website home page to show a new Subject Area entitled "Trash and Recycling" which would directly connect users to existing information.

COMM-2. County staff should develop a methodology to allow webpage links from the county's solid waste website to collection companies that are permitted to operate by the county.

COMM-3. County staff should continue to take the lead role in disseminating information about the county's solid waste and recycling policies and procedures using multiple communication channels.

COMM-4. County staff should expand its use of Channel 16 to disseminate information about the county's solid waste management program.

COMM-5. County staff should add a link from the Community Association Manual on its website to the Trash and Recycling webpage.

Collectors' Role in Communication

Traditionally, solid waste collectors have communicated with customers following their own policies and procedures. Some companies only provide written information to new customers, while others communicate more frequently. Usually, customer communication comes to the collector in the form of a question or complaint, so it is paramount that collection companies have the equipment and personnel in place to adequately answer questions and inquiries from their customers. The SWTF encourages collectors to provide the level of communication suggested in the Quality Customer Service Standards. Collectors have many avenues for communicating with their customers, including attaching materials to invoices, developing web-based information, or partnering with county staff in routine correspondence. The SWTF believes that the preferred manner for collectors to address customer service issues with their customers is directly without outside intervention.

Some of the communications strategies that collectors could adopt include:

- Informing customers that it has adopted the proposed Quality Customer Service Standards advocated by this task force and developed in conjunction with collection companies.
- Being accessible by telephone, e-mail, or other methods.
- Responding to the concerns of customers by addressing service issues quickly.
- Communicating more frequently with their customers.
- Subscribing to the county's community emergency alert system so they will know when emergency situations activate the system.

Customers' Role in Communication

Customers are also important to establishing better communication. They typically communicate openly when they perceive something in the solid waste process has gone wrong. The causes for such communication can range from missed curbside collections to complaints of speeding trucks in neighborhoods. However, some customers do not understand the policies, procedures or regulatory issues associated with solid waste. Occasionally, customers phoning the county do not even know the name of their service provider. The proposed expanded outreach by the county and collectors is an important element of improved communication with customers. This outreach should also result in feedback from customers.

Some of the ways in which customers can improve communication include the following:

- Reading and complying with guidance provided by the county or the collection company regarding proper curbside set-out of waste and recycling materials.
- Notifying their collection company when service problems arise and notify the county only if those problems are not resolved.
- Choosing a collection company that best fits with their needs, including their communication expectations.
- Notifying county staff or the Board of Supervisors about their concerns when countywide policy changes are necessary.
- Referring to the Quality Customer Service Standards in homeowner association collection agreements or contracts.

Appendices

- A List of Categorized Issues**
- B Minutes of Solid Waste Task Force Meetings**
- C Quality Customer Service Standards**
- D County Research on Plastic versus Paper Bags for
Yard Waste Collection**
- E Tour of Recycling and Disposal Facilities**
- F Fairfax County Collection Service Areas**

